

2014

# Excellence in Community-Engaged Research at Virginia Commonwealth University: A Compendium of Case Studies Developed Through a Faculty Learning Community

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# Excellence in Community-Engaged Research at Virginia Commonwealth University: A Compendium of Case Studies Developed Through a Faculty Learning Community

## **Abstract**

Since 2005, the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) at VCU has offered faculty learning communities (FLC) on a variety of teaching and learning issues. For 2013-2014, VCU's Division of Community Engagement, Center for Clinical and Translational Research, and Center for Teaching Excellence collaborated to offer the first FLC focused on community-engaged research (CEnR). This FLC included 9 faculty members who are or who had been engaged in complex research projects that intentionally connect the campus and community. The members represented a wide range of disciplines, including education, social work, arts, public health, cancer prevention and control, psychology, family medicine, nutritional science, and human and molecular genetics. Their CEnR experiences served as a source of insights for developing a framework to identify and describe excellence in CEnR at the university. The cornerstone of this learning community was the development of publishable case studies of exemplary CEnR projects in order to inform the broader campus and higher education community about excellence in CEnR.

## **Keywords**

community-engaged research, faculty learning community, CEnR

## **Disciplines**

Higher Education

**Virginia Commonwealth University**

**Excellence in Community-Engaged Research at  
Virginia Commonwealth University: A  
Compendium of Case Studies Developed Through a  
Faculty Learning Community**

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Center for Clinical and Translational Research and Division of Community Engagement



**VCU**

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

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## Forward

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As a major research university in an urban environment, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is an anchor institution for greater Richmond, contributing to the economic vitality and health of the entire region. As VCU takes its place among the nation's top 50 public research universities, as determined by The Center for Measuring University Performance, our guiding principles maintain an abiding focus on student success at all levels, unparalleled innovation through research, a university-wide commitment to human health, and engagement with our communities. VCU strengthened its position as a top-ranked urban, public research university and earned "Research University, Very High Research Activity" status and the Community Engagement Classification from the Carnegie Foundation – VCU is one of only 28 national public research universities with academic medical centers that hold both distinctions. Partially due to its commitment in community engagement, the university also is one of 60 institutions with an NIH-sponsored Clinical and Translational Sciences Award (CTSA). In building on its commitment, the current strategic plan emphasizes community engagement as a priority and a means to providing high quality learning experiences and advancing excellence in research (<http://www.quest.vcu.edu>). As part of its continuing effort to recognize and encourage engaged work, in 2013 VCU added community-engaged research, teaching, and service to its revised promotion and tenure policy.

Community-engaged research (CEnR), or the involvement of stakeholders beyond the university in the research process, is increasingly viewed as a promising approach to both knowledge generation and regional development (Andrews, Newman, Meadows, Cox, & Bunting, 2012). VCU's Division of Community Engagement (DCE), the CTSA funded Center for Clinical and Translational Research (CCTR), the Office of Research and others have worked across the university to engage key stakeholders and enhance infrastructure that will further promote and support high quality, high impact CEnR at VCU. One of these efforts is the Faculty Learning Community (FLC) on Excellence in Community-Engaged Research at VCU.

VCU defines CEnR as "a collaborative process between the researcher and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. CEnR identifies the assets of all stakeholders and incorporates them in the design and conduct of the different phases of the research process".

Typically focused on a teaching or learning issue, an FLC is a cross-disciplinary group of 6 – 10 faculty who engage in an active, collaborative, and self-guided exploration of an identified topic. Participants immerse themselves in a prolonged exploration of an issue as "expert" learners in an attempt to (1) better understand the issue, (2) make modifications to their practice based on what they have learned, and (3) promote better teaching and learning across the institution by sharing what they have learned with a wider audience (Cox, 2004). In addition to its effectiveness in building faculty competencies, FLCs encourage collaboration among faculty to support new institutional initiatives (Cox, 2004; Furco & Moely, 2012).

Since 2005, the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) at VCU has offered FLCs on a variety of teaching and learning issues. For 2013-2014, DCE, CCTR and CTE collaborated to offer the first FLC focused on CEnR. This FLC included 9 faculty members who are or who had been engaged in complex research projects that intentionally connect the campus and community. The members represented a wide range of disciplines, including education, social work, arts, public health, cancer prevention and control, psychology, family medicine, nutritional science, and human and molecular genetics. Their CEnR experiences served as a source of insights for developing a framework to identify and describe excellence in CEnR at the university. The cornerstone of this learning community was the development of publishable case studies of exemplary CEnR projects in order to inform the broader campus and higher education community about excellence in CEnR.

This compendium contains case studies that highlight an engaged research project of each of the FLC members listed below, and/or the work of their colleagues at VCU.

#### FLC Members:

- Rosalie Corona, PhD, Associate Professor, Psychology, College of Humanities and Sciences
- Rebecca Etz, PhD, Assistant Professor, Family Medicine, School of Medicine
- Antonio Garcia, Director of Jazz Studies, Music Department, School of the Arts
- Valerie Holton, PhD, LCSW, FLC Facilitator and Director of Community-Engaged Research, Division of Community Engagement
- Maghboeba Mosavel, PhD, Associate Professor, Social and Behavioral Health, School of Medicine
- Sarah Kye Price, PhD, MSW, MS, PhD Program Director and Associate Professor, School of Social Work
- Elizabeth Prom-Wormley, PhD, MPH, Assistant Professor, Division of Epidemiology, Department of Family Medicine and Population Health, School of Medicine
- Carlin Rafie, PhD, Clinical Research Affiliation Coordinator, Massey Cancer Center
- Deborah Speece, PhD, Professor and Associate Dean of Research, School of Education

It is our hope that this compendium highlights the high-impact, high-quality research that occurs at VCU in partnership with our communities. They are formatted to serve as stand-alone case studies and as a more encompassing picture of the breadth of work occurring at VCU. We hope that these case studies will be used to inspire VCU faculty, staff and students to further engage stakeholders in research that contributes to the discipline and strengthens the well-being of our communities.



Valerie Holton, PhD, LCSW  
Director, Community-Engaged Research  
Division of Community Engagement  
Virginia Commonwealth University

## Conservation of Atlantic Sturgeon in the James River, VA: A community-engaged assessment of sturgeon behavior, their interactions with humans, and conservation needs

By Matt Balazik, PhD

<b>Project Focus:</b>	To obtain a better understanding of Atlantic Sturgeon in the James River, VA to promote conservation.	
<b>Key Partners:</b>	Graduate students from VCU Center for Environmental Studies, VCU Rice Rivers Center, VCU Center for Environmental Studies, US Fish and Wildlife Services, College of William and Mary's VA Institute of Marine Science, Engineer Research and Development Center of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, VCU Dept. of Biology, commercial fishermen, James River Association, VA watermen, U.S. Geological Survey.	
<b>Research Method:</b>	Telemetry, review of carcasses, examination of fish, reports from shipping boats, local reports and key informant interviews; all to examine sturgeon behavior and how they interact with humans to identify how humans can best conserve populations of the Atlantic Sturgeon in the James River.	
<b>Summary of Findings:</b>	Primarily, younger and older sturgeons are found in the James River and those in the 6-9 year age range appear to spend more time in the Atlantic Ocean. Death by vessel strike is a common way for healthy sturgeon to die. Sturgeons were found to spend the majority of their time within 1 meter of the river bottom and would benefit from humans protecting that zone. Empirical evidence was found that sturgeon spawn in the fall, which was previously thought to be untrue. Human behavior should not create boundaries between sturgeon and fall breeding zones.	
<b>Summary of Impacts:</b>	<p><b>Academic:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic publications and products</li> <li>• External funding to support work</li> <li>• Awards and recognitions for investigators</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased awareness of needs of sturgeon</li> <li>• Awareness of connection to humans</li> <li>• Sustained conservation partnerships</li> </ul>

This report presents the story of a successful Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) project that has occurred through partnerships between VCU and its surrounding community. VCU defines CEnR as:

*“A collaborative process between the researcher and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. CEnR identifies the assets of all stakeholders and incorporates them in the design and conduct of the different phases of the research process.”*

The partnership detailed in this report occurs within the culture of being “radically interdisciplinary” as established throughout VCU Life Sciences. The project was led by Dr. Matt Balazik, who was a Doctoral student in VCU Life Sciences

when he first initiated an inquiry into the lives of the Atlantic Sturgeon in the James River. The iconic sturgeon is an endangered species that plays a crucial role in our ecosystem. It is the most primitive fish along the Atlantic Coast, and healthy populations of sturgeon have supported humans as a food source throughout history. Academicians had long thought the sturgeon populations in the James River were gone; however, local fishermen knew differently. Through academic partnerships, they brought attention to this issue, which led to a systematic investigation into the James River and its population of sturgeon.

This project was the first systematic study of the sturgeon completed independent from the fishing industry, and sought to identify the existence of significant populations of sturgeon in the James and to better understand their behavior. It began in

2007 when recreational anglers and commercial fishermen began reporting evidence of sturgeon in the James. Dr. Balazik and his team at the VCU Rice River Center responded to these calls and organized an effort to track sturgeon sightings. Many community partners have since gotten involved including commercial fishing vessels, local angler societies, and government groups.

The VCU Rice Rivers Center and the community partners leveraged their combined resources (e.g. boats, equipment, and VCU students) to track the sturgeon. Due to their combined efforts, the VCU Rice Rivers Center was awarded the *Restoration of the Atlantic Sturgeon in the Chesapeake Bay* grant<sup>1</sup>, enabling them to place a global positioning system (GPS) in the James. Dr. Balazik and his team then set about using safe nets to capture sturgeon and tag them with advanced telemetry systems that enable the

tracking of sturgeon living in the James for years to come. As of spring 2014, 455 different adult fish have been captured and assessed, and 173 have received telemetry tags.

Data collected was used to depict the life history of the James River Sturgeon<sup>2</sup>, develop statistical models to predict age by pectoral fin spine length<sup>3</sup>, identify spawning habits<sup>4</sup>, identify zones of sturgeon activity to help fishermen avoid causing vessel strikes and unnecessary sturgeon death<sup>5</sup>, and educate students about the importance of the sturgeon through a national service-learning project<sup>6</sup>. The project was highlighted in several media sources<sup>7,8,9</sup> and received multiple awards and recognitions<sup>10</sup>. As a result of this partnership, we now have a system in place to follow trends in Atlantic Sturgeon populations in the James River, as well as a better understanding of how to protect their fall breeding grounds.

## **References and dissemination products related to this project**

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## The Petersburg Wellness Engagement Project: A community-driven effort to create a culture of health and well-being with the residents of Petersburg, Virginia

By Maghboeba Mosavel, Dwala Ferrell, Sarah Ochs, and Pamela Bingham

<b>Project Focus:</b>	This partnership focuses on the Petersburg, VA community to conceptualize and direct a research and action agenda to promote the overall health and well-being of this community through active engagement, meaningful partnerships, and innovative approaches.	
<b>Key Partners:</b>	VCU faculty, staff, and students; Pathways of Petersburg; Wellness Ambassadors (WA) and other local community residents; Community Health Leadership Council (CHLC) comprised of local stakeholders and partners including government, faith-based, non-profit, community organizations, and health care providers.	
<b>Research Method:</b>	Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach that employs local residents (WAs) through an academic-community partnership, as guided by an advisory council, to conceptualize and direct a community-driven research agenda that includes asset mapping, focus groups, community conversations, dramaturgical expression, and town halls, among other methods. WAs, the CHLC, and other partners work to plan, collect, analyze, interpret report, disseminate, and utilize their research findings to ensure local relevance.	
<b>Summary of Findings:</b>	Findings from this partnership will be used locally to inform decision-making towards a program that will increase health and well-being for families. The Wellness Engagement (WE) project has dedicated funding to implement an engagement plan that results in an intervention to reduce obesity. The WE project established the Petersburg Wellness Consortium (PWC) to leverage community resources to address health and wellness goals.	
<b>Summary of Impacts:</b>	<p><b>Academic:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building bridges between academic and community partners</li> <li>• Building capacity and funneling resources to work in partnership</li> <li>• Leveraged funding to support work</li> <li>• Research infrastructure for engaged research</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building capacity for academic researchers and institutions to conduct community-engaged research,</li> <li>• Ensuring participation and community representation at each level</li> <li>• Ensuring relevance of work in communities</li> </ul>

This report presents the story of a thriving Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) partnership between VCU and residents of Petersburg, VA. VCU defines CEnR as:

*“A collaborative process between the researcher and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. CEnR identifies the assets of all stakeholders and incorporates them in the design and conduct of the different phases of the research process.”*

Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) serves as the model guiding the engagement of partners in this project. CBPR emphasizes public health problems of local relevance and promotes taking an ecological

perspective to attend to the multiple determinants of health. CBPR is an appropriate CEnR method to choose if the project goals require community and academic partners to exchange local and scientific expertise at every stage of the research process.

This partnership originated from the experiences of Maghboeba Mosavel, PhD, VCU Social and Behavioral Health Department, during her work in Petersburg, VA on a cancer needs assessment<sup>1</sup>. Through her work in this community she became acutely aware of the needs and assets of the residents in Petersburg. Local partners connected her to Dwala Ferrell, Chief Executive Officer of Pathways<sup>2</sup>, a nonprofit dedicated to the vision that lasting change can only occur by partnering with residents. From the start of the initiative, residents of Petersburg were motivated to engage in creating a culture of health and wellness.

Petersburg is a resilient and resourceful community with a vast number of community organizations working to improve health and well-being. Obesity emerged as a top concern, particularly since it is a well-established pathway to many other chronic conditions. The WE research project was officially funded in 2013 by the National Institutes of Minority Health and Health Disparities.<sup>3</sup> The mission of the WE project is to “engage neighborhoods and city leadership in a shared process to develop solutions to reduce obesity”; in order to realize their vision of “a healthy and active Petersburg through research, community participation and invested partners.”<sup>3</sup>

An essential component of CBPR projects is that the partnership continues regardless of grant funding. To that end, the Petersburg Wellness Consortium (PWC) was formed to be the sustainable ‘arm’ of the WE project. As such, the PWC has their own vision and mission and the group launched the *Petersburg Million Mile Challenge* and are currently working to motivate residents to pledge<sup>4</sup> to walk one million collective miles in the next year.<sup>5</sup> The PWC has been featured in local outlets, has received sponsorship from various local groups, and has developed its own *Walking Group Toolkit*<sup>7</sup>.

The WE project is focused on engaging the residents of Petersburg to develop community-driven interventions for obesity prevention<sup>3</sup>. They are also committed to making sure that academic-

community partnerships are accountable to the community during the process. Laypersons are hired as Wellness Ambassadors (WA) and guide the work of the WE project, supported by the Community Health Leadership Council (CHLC). The WAs and CHLC are organized into three working groups: 1) Nutrition and Physical Activity, 2) Neighborhood and Family Engagement, and 3) Policy.

The WAs work to keep a finger on the pulse of what is important locally and more importantly, the WA’s are the foundation for the work conducted in Petersburg. Engaging laypersons in all aspects of the research has proven to be a powerful, enlightening, and immensely rewarding experience. This partnership demonstrates excellence in building local capacity around the expertise of laypersons to increase research relevance and project responsiveness. The WAs work to keep a finger on the pulse of what is important locally. Partners maintain social media<sup>8</sup> that shares WE and/or PWC information and also relevant health and wellness information from other local groups.

Maghboeba, Dwala, and the rest of the research team are excited by the work of the WE project, the successes of the PWC, and the dedication of the many community partners in Petersburg to authentically engage with residents to collaboratively create a culture of health and wellbeing.

## References and dissemination products related to this project

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- 6) VHQC. (2014). *A Step Up resource for Churches: Bless Your Heart*. <http://www.vhqc.org/docs/BYH-NEW-Web.pdf>
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- 8) Petersburg WE. (2014). *WE Project Facebook page*. <https://www.facebook.com/WellnessEngagementPetersburg>

## Richmond Latino Needs Assessment: A community-university partnership to identify health concerns and service needs for Latino youth

By Rosalie Corona, PhD, Associate Professor, VCU Department of Psychology

<b>Project Focus:</b>	To identify health concerns and service needs as related to Latino youth living in Richmond, VA.	
<b>Key Partners:</b>	VCU Department of Psychology, Department of Psychiatry, Clark-Hill Institute for Positive Youth Development, City of Richmond Office of Multicultural Affairs, Richmond Behavioral Health Authority, VCU graduate students, and Richmond's Latino community	
<b>Research Method:</b>	Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) engagement guiding collection of data from community surveys with 212 Latino adults, key informant interviews with 15 Latino community leaders, and a series of focus groups with Latino families including 23 parents (16 mothers and 7 fathers) and 6 children (all boys ages 11-14).	
<b>Summary of Findings:</b>	<p><b>Top Latino Health Concerns:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual health and safety</li> <li>• Behavior and mental health problems</li> <li>• Youth/parent communication barriers</li> <li>• Community safety and transportation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Top Latino Service Needs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for after-school programs</li> <li>• Need for bilingual mental health services</li> <li>• Concerns that Latino youth will lose their connection to Latin culture</li> </ul>
<b>Summary of Impacts:</b>	<p><b>Academic:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publications &amp; awards for investigators</li> <li>• External funding to support work</li> <li>• Requests from peers to replicate methods</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased awareness of service needs</li> <li>• Improved community services</li> <li>• Sustained research partnerships</li> </ul>

This report presents the story of an exemplary Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) project that has occurred through partnerships between VCU and its surrounding community. VCU defines CEnR as:

*“A collaborative process between the researcher and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. CEnR identifies the assets of all stakeholders and incorporates them in the design and conduct of the different phases of the research process.”*

Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) served as the model guiding the engagement of partners in this project. CBPR emphasizes public health problems of local relevance and promotes taking an ecological perspective to attend to the multiple determinants of health. CBPR is an appropriate CEnR method if the project goals require community and academic

partners to exchange local and scientific expertise at every stage of the research process.

The presence of Latino immigrants in the Richmond area is a relatively new phenomenon, and the capacity of the community to provide targeted and culturally relevant services was determined by these partners to be low. This partnership sought to use CBPR and a mixed-methods research design to identify the health concerns and service needs of Latino youth to improve the community's response to this vulnerable population.

Community partners were actively engaged in each stage of the research process, serving roles in identifying the focus of the project, designing the research methods, writing a grant to secure funding for implementation, recruiting participants, ensuring informed consent, analyzing the results, preparing the findings for dissemination to diverse audience and using the findings to create community change. Since language was an identified barrier to participation, bilingual partners assisted throughout the process.

The group decided that a mixed-methods approach was the best way to answer their research questions. A family event, *El Papucho Latino*, was organized to promote awareness of available services, which also provided a context for partners to administer a survey to Latino adults. Organizational partnerships were also used to coordinate key informant interviews and a series of focus groups with Latino families that provided more in-depth information.

Findings from the study were analyzed by the group and prepared for multiple dissemination outlets. A formal report<sup>1</sup> was prepared for local decision-makers, who met with research partners and used the information to respond to Latino-identified needs and concerns<sup>2</sup>, which resulted in improved services for this community. Research partners were interviewed by multiple media outlets and the project was presented at various community academic events. A formal report of the research was also published in a journal<sup>3</sup>.

Rosalie Corona, who served as the Principal Investigator for this project, was recognized as one of Richmond's Top 40 under 40<sup>5</sup> in 2007 and has received multiple requests from other groups wishing to replicate the study's methods. Dr. Corona is currently an Associate Professor in VCU's Department of Psychology and serves as the founding Director of VCU's Latino Mental Health Clinic<sup>4</sup>, which works to sustain changes resulting from this project.

This project reflects how all partners can benefit from engaged research. Their commitment is demonstrated over time, as they work together to understand their community. The diverse products tailored for each audience presented findings in a way that contributed to the academic discipline and to Richmond's Latino community's well-being. We are sure to see continued high-quality and high-impact research emerge from this group as VCU partners continue to support the Latino community.

### **References and dissemination products resulting from this project**

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<http://www.styleweekly.com/richmond/dr-rosalie-corona-36/Content?oid=1370928>.
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## A Jazz Bridge to Greater Understanding: An international university partnership exploring a shared history of racism and jazz activism for social justice and musical expression

By Antonio García, Director of Jazz Studies at VCU

<b>Project Focus:</b>	To understand how jazz musicians are motivated to create music as a message for positive change.	
<b>Key Partners:</b>	VCU Jazz Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal's Centre for Jazz and Popular Music (UKZN); South African music legend Madala Kunene and Richmond musical icon Plunky Branch, University of VA historian John Edwin Mason, percussionist Efrain Toro, VCU Prof. Siemon Allen, VA Museum of Fine Arts, The Smithsonian, Library of Congress, National Endowment For The Arts, Durban's KwaMuhle Museum, Richmond's Black History Museum, and The American Civil War Center at Tredegar.	
<b>Research Method:</b>	Teams of VCU and UKZN students, faculty, and partners visited each other twice, exploring music and culture. The team created four commissioned works (two by VCU, two by UKZN) and several new musical arrangements, each which demanded that one team explore the other's culture. Partners collaborated in many venues around the world and via the internet and were systematic in archiving photos, narratives, student reflections, and dissemination products.	
<b>Summary of Findings:</b>	There was an increased understanding among partners regarding the depth of cultural influence on the creation and performance of music, as well as the notational limitations in conveying such within written music. The parity of South African and American music forms was revealed as platforms for musical dialogue between respective ensembles. Partners came to understand the critical importance of having a voice in one's community and in knowing the risks associated with expressing that voice.	
<b>Summary of Impacts:</b>	<p><b>Academic:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publications and musical productions</li> <li>• Student learning outcomes achieved</li> <li>• National/international recognition</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased self-discovery among partners</li> <li>• Community concerts on both continents</li> <li>• Sustained social bonding &amp; partnerships</li> </ul>

This report presents the story of an exemplary Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) project that has occurred through partnerships between VCU and its international community. VCU defines CEnR as:

*“A collaborative process between the researcher and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. CEnR identifies the assets of all stakeholders and incorporates them in the design and conduct of the different phases of the research process.”*

The partnership detailed in this report did not follow a formalized CEnR model or design, other than the conventions jazz musicians typically invoke when researching new music and its origins. It cut across boundaries between teaching and

research as it explored the complex interplay between music and culture in relationship with local and international partners. UKZN and VCU are partner universities who have shared resources and grants from VCU's Global Education Office, VCUarts, and VCU Music to build a “jazz bridge” between Richmond, VA and Durban, South Africa to create products of collaborative expression.

From the start, the group's focus was to examine a shared history of racism and segregation as well as the shared voices of jazz musicians who have served as activists and advocates for social change. The intention was to demonstrate to jazz students on both continents that creating music is not merely an assignment of gathering compatible pitches, harmonies, and rhythms: out of oppression has emerged music that speaks for freedom.

Organized opportunities for co-presence, artistic collaboration, and dialogue were the primary methods of engagement for this project.

Academic partners facilitated connections, secured funding, and worked to maintain project documentation including recordings, photo journals, media reports, reflective journals, and a project blog.<sup>1</sup> While some events were highly-structured (such as coordinating international travel for students), activity structure for the group overall was fluid and very responsive to members.

Discoveries from community partners greatly influenced the direction of the project. Jazz legends and acclaimed musicians encountered in the community led to collaboration and performances. Overall, the group functioned organically and took advantage of chance meetings and coincidental occurrences in order to maximize the partnership between VCU and UKZN and increase the group's connection to diverse resources.

Tangible products from this project include four newly commissioned works on the CD *Leap of Faith*<sup>2</sup>, distributed in both countries<sup>3,4</sup>; a co-written article in *Down Beat* magazine<sup>5</sup>; multiple concerts

on both continents, and VCU's 2013 *Community Engagement Award for Research*<sup>6</sup>. VCU Jazz was also later invited by the South African Embassy to perform at *The National Memorial Service for Nelson Mandela* at The National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.<sup>7</sup>

New bonds were created among partners, and students learned how having something substantive to share within your music and knowing your own cultural roots and the roots of others allows an artist to present a substantial perspective.

Serving as the academic leads for this project were Antonio García, Director of Jazz Studies at VCU, and Neil Gonsalves, Director of the UKZN Centre for Jazz and Popular Music. VCU Jazz and UKZN continue to collaborate and to identify opportunities for university and student engagement. The initial 2012-13 project continued into 2013-14 and at this writing is entering year three in 2014-15.

## **References and dissemination products resulting from this project**

- 1) García, Antonio. (2013). *Jazz Bridge Project Blog*. Retrieved: [wp.vcu.edu/vcu jazz/](http://wp.vcu.edu/vcu jazz/).
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  - b. le Roux, Stephan (UKZN). "*Leap of Faith*."
  - c. Dlamini, Sazi (UKZN). "*Makalafukwe*."
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- 6) VCUarts, Dept. of Music. (2013). *VCU Faculty Update for May 2013: A University Award*. Retrieved: <http://arts.vcu.edu/music/2013/07/11/may-faculty-news/>.
- 7) Washington National Cathedral. (12/13/2013). "*In Thanksgiving for and in Celebration of the Life of Nelson Mandela* (DVD). VCU Alumni Jazz Quartet, performing "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" (traditional, arranged by Antonio García), "That We Might Walk Free" (Antonio García), and "Sobukwe" (Ezra Ngcukana, arranged by Antonio García). Archived online at: <http://www.nationalcathedral.org/worship/worshipArchive.shtml>

## Engagement for Maternal and Child Health Service Improvement: A community-engaged partnership to design, implement, and test innovative service models for maternal and child health home visiting programs in Virginia

By Sarah K. Price, PhD, Associate Professor, VCU School of Social Work

<b>Project Focus:</b>	Sustained research partnership focused on understanding the experiences and perspectives of women served by maternal and child health (MCH) home visiting programs in Virginia; the experiences and perspectives of the service providers who visit them in their homes; and then to work with service systems to collaboratively design, research, and disseminate enhanced care intervention models tailored for the needs of low income mothers in Virginia within the capacities of the service system.	
<b>Key Partners:</b>	VCU faculty and students; Family Lifeline, LLC; Children's Health Involving Parents (CHIP) of Greater Richmond, Petersburg, and Virginia; consumers of MCH services and their home visitation staff	
<b>Research Method:</b>	Grounded in Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR), enhanced by clinical Social Work practice values in identifying client's assets and building capacity over time. This partnership utilizes various research methods to explore an array of issues from multiple perspectives to help guide real world, data-driven decision making and evidence-based practice (EBP).	
<b>Summary of Findings:</b>	Service providers want to provide the most competent support services and to be able to conduct ongoing evaluation and continuous quality improvement. Further, consumers do appear to trust and value their home visitors as having a positive impact in their lives, which is reinforced by their often negative experiences with the fractured health care systems available in low income areas. Service systems that are culturally informed and responsive to the needs of low income mothers from an ecological perspective can serve as a viable and effective way to expand on existing MCH home visitations and meet this and other unmet consumer needs to improve personal and public health.	
<b>Summary of Impacts:</b>	<p><b>Academic:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publications and recognition for investigators</li> <li>• Internal and external funding support</li> <li>• Prolonged partnership and development of research infrastructure.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased understanding of service needs</li> <li>• Improved maternal/child health services</li> <li>• Training and skill development for staff</li> <li>• Organizational capacity for EBP.</li> </ul>

This report presents the story of a successful Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) project that is occurring through partnerships between VCU and its surrounding community. VCU defines CEnR as:

*“A collaborative process between the researcher and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. CEnR identifies the assets of all stakeholders and incorporates them in the design and conduct of the different phases of the research process.”*

Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) serves as the model guiding engagement for this partnership. CBPR emphasizes public health

problems of local relevance and promotes taking an ecological perspective to attend to the multiple determinants of health. CBPR is an appropriate CEnR method to apply if the project goals require community and academic partners to exchange local and scientific expertise to address community needs and issues. This partnership addresses mental health services and further enhances CBPR models with clinical social work values in identifying the assets of the consumers of our services, and then to use the most effective interventions known to be viable in the given environment in order to accomplish consumer-driven goals.

Maternal and child health (MCH) home visitation services<sup>1</sup> are situated within the public health infrastructure and are intended to address

women's mental and physical health around pregnancy. Local service providers have identified that many of the low income women who consume MCH services are also experience perinatal depression. It is important for these providers to be able to discern culturally situated beliefs about what constitutes a normal response to stressful life events, while simultaneously assessing how wider community beliefs and experiences with poverty and stigma impact their consumers' perspective and needs.

Helping service providers to better support their consumers, this community/academic partnership formed in 2008 and has developed trust and synergy for action over time. The research activities originated with an in-depth analysis of consumer needs and experiences in receiving MCH home visitation services. An emergent design was employed, consisting of focus groups and in-depth face-to-face interviews with both consumers of services and the professionals and para-professionals providing the home visiting services.

Multiple layers of thematic analysis were then conducted in order to reduce the data to build consensus among the voice of participants around relevant cultural and community norms that influence consumer health, such as fear of the stigma of being labeled a "bad mother;" barriers to appropriate health services; daily experiences with poverty, stress, sadness, and loss; and a general

sense of the normalcy of daily depression as a result of these environmental factors. Consumers differentiated daily depression, situational sadness from trauma or loss, and ongoing chronic depression. These mothers also expressed that reproductive loss was not something typically talked about with their family, and something like a miscarriage may go completely undiscussed.

Themes emerging from the service provider perspective demonstrated understanding of the economic situation of the women whose homes they visited. They understood the barriers faced in access to mental health services for these women, but also often felt uncomfortable and/or unqualified to speak directly with them about depression. Ongoing engagement with these providers has led to the development of a new model for practice that provides support and training to service provider staff to help prepare them to engage in discussions about depression during home visits<sup>3</sup>.

Ongoing community engagement with Sarah K. Price, Ph.D., who serves as the Principal Investigator for this partnership<sup>4</sup>, are working to evaluate this new intervention model as well as working to ensure effective screening and utilization for a centralized intake system designed to connect behavior health services and those in need of support<sup>5</sup>.

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  - 3) Gray, L., & Price, S.K. (2014). Partnering for mental health promotion: Implementing evidence-based mental health services within a maternal and child home health visiting program. *Clinical Social Work Journal, 42*, 70-80.
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## The 7<sup>th</sup> District Health and Wellness Survey: A community-engaged assessment to expand existing community/academic partnerships working to generate effective local action

By Elizabeth Prom-Wormley, MPH, PhD, Assistant Professor, VCU Department of Family Medicine and Population Health, Division of Epidemiology

<b>Project Focus:</b>	The partnership is currently conducting a needs assessment and expands upon existing VCU partnerships in the East End community of Richmond, Virginia (VA) working to promote health in this community <sup>1</sup> .	
<b>Key Partners:</b>	VCU faculty and students, East End resident recruiters, resident and non-resident survey administrators, community organization representatives including the East District Family Resource Center and other members of the 7 <sup>th</sup> District Health and Wellness Initiative <sup>2</sup> (HWI), which is an existing collaborative partnership between residents, elected officials, health care providers.	
<b>Research Method:</b>	Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach that employs East End residents and supporters that have received training as research partners. They are currently recruiting 1,000 East End residents to complete an online health survey. This project works toward 3 mutual community/academic goals including: 1) assessing the current state of health and access to health care in the 7 <sup>th</sup> District, 2) developing the foundation for long-term health-related collaborations in the East End, and 3) testing the feasibility of using an internet-based survey to complete a data collection project of this scope.	
<b>Dissemination Plan:</b>	Findings from this project will be analyzed with East End residents and community partner organizations, who will also support the development of diverse publications designed to be disseminated in both academic and community forums.	
<b>Anticipated Impacts:</b>	<p><b>Academic:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publications for investigators</li> <li>• Leveraged local funding to support work</li> <li>• Immediate translation of findings into action</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased community awareness of needs</li> <li>• Improved services and capacity for research</li> <li>• Paid employment &amp; skills for local residents</li> </ul>

This report presents the story of a developing Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) project that is developing partnership momentum between VCU and its surrounding community. VCU defines CEnR as:

*“A collaborative process between the researcher and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. CEnR identifies the assets of all stakeholders and incorporates them in the design and conduct of the different phases of the research process.”*

Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) served as the model guiding the engagement of partners in this project. CBPR emphasizes public health problems of local

relevance and promotes taking an ecological perspective to attend to the multiple determinants of health. CBPR is an appropriate CEnR method to choose if the project goals require community and academic partners to exchange local and scientific expertise to address community needs and issues.

A large gap still exists between the reporting of basic epidemiological results and their practical application and utilization in prevention, treatment and education. Despite consistent reports about the influence of risk factors such as poor diet, exercise and access to health care from large-scale nationally representative studies; these results rarely translate into neighborhood-specific approaches to improve resident health. This lack of integration between research groups, community service organizations and community residents leads to challenges for maintaining sustainable

health-related projects in the East End of Richmond, VA<sup>3</sup>.

A CBPR approach to epidemiological studies of health-related issues through partnership with residents and community health and wellness service providers in the East End is expected to improve resident awareness, as well as interest in future community-based research activities. The primary community of engagement includes any adult resident from the East End living in or around Creighton Court, Mosby Court, Fairfield Court, Whitcomb Court; or those who may live outside of these areas but receive services from any community health resource center, the East District Family Resource Center (FRC) and/or the Neighborhood Resource Center (NRC).

Staff members of the FRC serve as the Project Coordinator and Data Manager to maintain strong communication among team members and to ensure data safety throughout the duration of the project. Every member of the project team has received human research protections and research methods training. Resident Recruiters will be employed by the project and will serve as participant recruiters and data collectors.

East End Resident and Non-Resident Survey Administrators will work with survey participants from the East End community to complete an

online survey in a community setting. Resource and community centers also help recruit by sharing information with potential participants about how to complete a survey.

While this project has yet to obtain formal grant support with which to secure classic monetary participant incentives, community partners have coordinated various incentives local to each section of the community, including gift bags and spaghetti lunches. Each survey participant will also be entered into a drawing for gift card give aways. The lack of grant support has encouraged the various partners to come together and build trust and cohesion as they work towards their common mission, which is to better understand the health needs in their community. A community event will be planned after the data is collected and analyzed by partners so that findings from the project can be shared with the East End community.

Elizabeth Prom-Wormley serves as the Principal Investigator for this project, which exemplifies VCU's ongoing commitment to the East End. This project will make data available that community/ academic partnerships can then use to set their priorities and target interventions in a data-driven way that will promote both capacity to engage in research and also quality of life in the East End.

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## Community Resident Cancer Needs Assessment Coordinators: A community-engaged model of cancer resource and need assessment to generate effective local action

By Carlin Rafie, PhD, Clinical Research Affiliation Coordinator for VCU Massey Center Cancer

<b>Project Focus:</b>	The project responded to an identified cancer disparity in the community and grew from a clinical and educational engagement to a larger investigation of cancer care in four communities in Richmond, Virginia (VA).	
<b>Key Partners:</b>	Coordinated by Virginia Commonwealth University Massey Cancer Center (MCC), VA Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission (TICRC); led by a Statewide Advisory Committee with members from VA Department of Health, the Cancer Registry, advocacy organizations, health care companies, VCU, and community cancer advocates; and implemented by local community residents employed and trained as Cancer Needs Assessment Coordinators (CNAC).	
<b>Research Method:</b>	Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach where CNACs conducted assessments of four communities in Southern Virginia, defined by Health Districts that were identified to have a historical economic dependence on the tobacco industry and also be medically underserved. Assessments were designed to evaluate the cancer burden, community resources and attitudes across the cancer care continuum in a holistic way, with data being used by CNACs to promote local change.	
<b>Summary of Findings:</b>	There were region-specific findings as well as common findings across all health districts. All of the districts studied had cancer burden disparities compared to Virginia, and had limited primary care health facilities and resources. Racial cancer disparities similar to those seen in Virginia were found in the health districts that were racially diverse. Each community had deficiencies in access to cancer detection and treatment, preventive education and support, and continuity of care across providers. CNACs mobilized to present findings to various community groups and decision makers in order to meet the regional and locally identified priorities for action.	
<b>Summary of Impacts:</b>	<p><b>Academic:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publications for Investigators</li> <li>• External funding to support work</li> <li>• Translation of findings into action</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased community awareness of needs</li> <li>• Improved services and supports</li> <li>• Paid employment &amp; skills for local residents</li> </ul>

This report presents the story of a successful Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) project that has occurred through partnerships between VCU and its surrounding community. VCU defines CEnR as:

*“a collaborative process between the researcher and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. CEnR identifies the assets of all stakeholders and incorporates them in the design and conduct of the different phases of the research process”*

Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) served as the model guiding the engagement of partners in this project. CBPR emphasizes public health problems of local

relevance and promotes taking an ecological perspective to attend to the multiple determinants of health. CBPR is an appropriate CEnR method to apply if the project goals require community and academic partners to exchange local and scientific expertise to address community needs and issues.

Cancer is a significant health problem in Virginia, impacting the physical, emotional, economic, and social well-being of individuals, their families, and communities. Cancer was the leading cause of death in Virginia in 2007, surpassing heart disease. Across VA, there are varying degrees of knowledge and access to health care. For cancer prevention and control efforts to be effective in reducing the burden of cancer in Virginia, they must be complete, comprehensive, sustainable, community-specific, and culturally and linguistically appropriate. This project sought to promote cultural diversity and variable cancer

resources by conducting community specific evaluations of perspectives, resources and needs of local residents to guide planning priorities.

A Statewide Advisory Committee was formed from various stakeholders and Cancer Needs Assessment Coordinators (CNAC) were recruited from local community residents and trained to serve as data collectors, analyzers, reporters, and disseminators for this project. CNACs also helped design the assessment process, recruited participants<sup>1,2,3</sup>, and collected data in ways that were relevant for their local communities<sup>4</sup>.

CNACs and local partners were heavily involved in analyzing the data. Academic partners prepared reports of the numbers, and CNACs presented these findings to various local groups<sup>5</sup> and decision makers<sup>6</sup> and discussed the impact of these numbers

and what they really meant for community members. Academic partners worked with each local group in order to prepare four individual reports for each of the engaged communities<sup>7</sup>. These reports, shared by CNACs, helped local leaders recognize and address priority areas<sup>8</sup>. Findings also helped to inform the statewide Cancer Action Coalition of VA's 2013-2017 Cancer Plan<sup>9</sup>.

Ongoing community/academic partnerships persist to sustain changes achieved from this project and to continue the enhancement of cancer services in these areas<sup>10</sup>. Participation has led to an increase in services for the communities and empowerment for the CNACs, who continue to serve their communities in fighting cancer through research<sup>11</sup>.

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- 5) Mathena, S. (2012). *Findings of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment: Pittsylvania/Danville District*. Retrieved: [http://www.mydanvillelegendas.info/docs/2012/CCREG/20120221\\_63/226\\_Findings%20of%20the%20Cancer%20Needs%20Assessment%20Project.pdf](http://www.mydanvillelegendas.info/docs/2012/CCREG/20120221_63/226_Findings%20of%20the%20Cancer%20Needs%20Assessment%20Project.pdf)
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- 11) Jackson, M. (2013). *Cancer-free volunteers needed for new study*. [http://www.godanriver.com/news/danville/cancer-free-volunteers-needed-for-new-study/article\\_33711761-68fc-5acb-aaf4-a093ee154ccc.html?mode=jqm](http://www.godanriver.com/news/danville/cancer-free-volunteers-needed-for-new-study/article_33711761-68fc-5acb-aaf4-a093ee154ccc.html?mode=jqm)

## Engaging Richmond: A partnership to strengthen Richmond's East End community and to support them in driving their own research agenda for health and well-being

By Amber Haley, Associate Director of the Community Engagement Core, Center for Clinical and Translational Research

<b>Project Focus:</b>	Engaging Richmond (ER) is a community-university partnership at the Center on Society and Health (COSH) formed to identify and address the health priorities of residents in Richmond's East End. Its mission is to explore social determinants of health through mixed methods research in order to find and propose community-based solutions.	
<b>Key Partners:</b>	With support from the Center for Clinical and Translational Research (CCTR), East End Residents, VCU faculty, staff, and students work as co-investigators. ER's work has been funded by the CCTR, National Institutes of Health, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts, and Kresge Foundation. ER has a strong working partnership with Richmond Promise Neighborhood, a collaborative working to develop a model of transformation for Richmond's East End.	
<b>Research Method:</b>	The team employs community-based participatory approach to methods including PhotoVoice, asset mapping, focus groups, survey administration, and dissemination planning.	
<b>Summary of Findings:</b>	Based on ER's participatory needs assessment, mental well-being, workforce development and parental involvement are top priorities for future community based initiatives and research.	
<b>Summary of Impacts:</b>	<p><b>Academic:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scholarly disseminations</li> <li>• Internal and external support funding</li> <li>• Immediate translation of findings into action</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased awareness and services</li> <li>• Strengthened community engagement</li> <li>• Paid employment &amp; skills for local residents</li> </ul>

This report presents the story of a model Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) partnership between VCU and various members of the East End community in Richmond, VA. VCU defines CEnR as:

*“A collaborative process between the researcher and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. CEnR identifies the assets of all stakeholders and incorporates them in the design and conduct of the different phases of the research process.”*

ER serves as a model partnership that maximizes assets and supports the residents of Richmond's East End in developing the capacity to direct their own research agenda. ER community researchers have chosen to lead multiple research projects and create products that contribute to various academic disciplines and/or facilitate creative expression. ER officially formed in 2011

with support from a National Institute of Health (NIH) grant<sup>1</sup> to identify and address the health priorities of residents in Richmond's East End<sup>2</sup>. Its mission is to explore social determinants of health through mixed methods research in order to find and propose community-based solutions.

ER works to recruit local residents interested in engaging in research activities and offers them support to do so. Academic partners work to ensure that all research team members<sup>3</sup> are trained and/or supported to be meaningfully engaged as a research partner. ER team members regularly work on research projects at all stages of design, including conceptualization, design, human research protections, research methods, data analysis, and dissemination.

In 2012, ER conducted focus groups<sup>4</sup> with local residents to determine the community priorities that currently guide their work to include workforce development, parental involvement, and mental well-being<sup>5</sup>.

Together, ER has implemented many local events and coordinated several local research

projects including the Northside Parental Engagement Study, The Cost of Firearms Violence study, an Education and Health Initiative study<sup>6</sup>, a Health Impact Assessment of Reduced Food Stamp Eligibility study<sup>7</sup>, and other environmental assessments<sup>8</sup>. ER also used the methods of PhotoVoice<sup>9</sup> to add a visual element to the participatory process by actively engaging community members in planning and policy issues. ER disseminates research findings with support from the COSH website and blog to share their successes<sup>10</sup> with the local public and have been interviewed and/or reported on by the Richmond Times Dispatch and other media outlets<sup>2,4</sup>.

ER research team members regularly share their findings through academic channels, including the annual meetings of Community Campus Partnerships for Health, Eastern Sociological Society<sup>10</sup>, the American Public Health Association<sup>11</sup>, and Academy Health<sup>12</sup>, where they have made scholarly contributions to advance academic understanding of how to best engage community members in research processes. Community impacts that have occurred include improved services and supports, enhanced networks, increased capacity for planning and problem solving, and improved quality of life for residents.

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## Middle School Mathematics Teacher Evaluation: The Role of Subject Matter in Supervisor Feedback

By Christine Trinter, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Teaching and Learning, VCU School of Education

<b>Project Focus:</b>	To develop an understanding of how the teacher evaluation process for middle school math teachers is shaped by the background knowledge of the evaluator.	
<b>Key Partners:</b>	VCU's School of Education, Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium (MERC), Chesterfield Public Schools, Colonial Heights Public Schools, Hanover Public Schools, Henrico Public Schools, Hopewell Public Schools, Powhatan Public Schools, and Richmond Public Schools	
<b>Research Method:</b>	Community-engaged research (CEnR) approach using grounded qualitative methods with approximately six three-person (n=18) teacher evaluation teams (teachers and administrators) from school divisions across the Richmond region. Data collection includes observation protocols, interviews, lesson plan review, and surveys.	
<b>Summary of Findings:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The nature of feedback between observers with mathematics subject matter background and those without this background differs.</li> <li>• Observers with mathematics backgrounds focus on multiple levels of best practice including complexity level of tasks, conceptual and procedural knowledge, mathematical models, and connections within and between mathematical concepts.</li> <li>• Teachers perceived the types of feedback that they receive from observers with different levels of mathematics background as being: 1) pedagogically and behaviorally focused, or 2) content focused.</li> <li>• Observers expressed difficulty in providing effective feedback to teachers who instruct in content areas that are different from their own background experiences.</li> </ul>	
<b>Summary of Impacts:</b>	<p><b>Academic:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased knowledge for the mathematics education and assessment fields about the nature of written feedback.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased awareness for school district policy makers regarding teacher evaluation criteria and practice.</li> </ul>

This report presents the story of an exemplary project occurring within a model Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) partnership between VCU and public schools in the greater Richmond, VA area. VCU defines CEnR as:

*“A collaborative process between the researcher and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. CEnR identifies the assets of all stakeholders and incorporates them in the design and conduct of the different phases of the research process.”*

This report presents the story of a action research project that has occurred through the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium<sup>1</sup> (MERC), a regional consortium of VCU and eight

Richmond area public school divisions dedicated to improving K-12 education through conducting and disseminating action and applied research and evaluation. Over the past 20 years, MERC has established a community that builds on the professional experience and practical wisdom of school leaders as well as the research expertise of university faculty<sup>(2-6)</sup>. While the primary effect of teacher action research is on the practice of teacher-researchers and the outcomes of their students, there is significant value in the broader dissemination of the research findings.

The impetus for this study emerged from a concern among the regional school divisions with new systems of teacher evaluation<sup>7</sup>. With the state and national policy focus on accountability and teacher quality in K-12 schools, local school divisions have been mandated to adopt and implement new systems for evaluating teachers.

While some of these teacher evaluation systems assess the impact of individual teachers on specific student outcomes – namely standardized test achievement – there is also a key component of the evaluation systems that involves classroom observations of teachers by administrators.

Within the discussions among policymakers and division-level administrators at MERC meetings, local school leaders expressed concern about how the quality of these teacher observations may be influenced by the background content knowledge of the evaluators. Of particular concern were the systems used to evaluate math teachers. Not only is math a priority area in regards to the state accountability systems, but it is also an area with significant shortages of highly qualified teachers. Considering this need, this study was designed to address the following question: How does the mathematical background of the evaluator shape his or her use of the school district's Teacher Evaluation System Observation Instrument?

To address this question a study team was assembled that included Dr. Chrissy Trinter as the principal investigator (PI), a graduate assistant, and 11 teachers and administrators from seven of the eight MERC school divisions. The study team has

met on a regular basis to discuss the topic, refine the research question, and determine appropriate research design and data collection methods. While the data collection and the primary analysis will be conducted by the PI, the study team will review drafts of the analysis and develop strategies for dissemination within the school divisions. It is expected that findings from this study will be used by school division-level policy makers to inform their decision-making, as well as by building level administrators and department heads as they implement teacher evaluation systems in their schools. Forms of dissemination for this research may include articles in scholarly journals, formal reports for division personnel, and professional development sessions for administrators and teachers.

This project illustrates how community-university engagement and AR in K-12 education can be used to respond to the unique needs of school divisions. A core belief that underlies this model of research is that collaborative research relationships between university research faculty and K-12 practitioners not only adds to the relevance and utility of the research, but also improves the quality of its findings.

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## Engaging Virginia Ambulatory Care Outcomes Research Network's (ACORN) Practices to Facilitate Relationships, Collaboration, and Communication

By Camille Washington, Practice Advocate, Virginia Ambulatory Care Outcomes Research Network, Department of Family Medicine and Population Health

<b>Project Focus:</b>	To engage primary care practices throughout the state of Virginia in collaborative research able to improve health and transform primary care delivery. Activities of ACORN identify and address the priorities and concerns of community physicians.	
<b>Key Partners:</b>	Administrative and financial support via the Department of Family Medicine and Population Health faculty and staff, primary care practices and their teams, health systems, local, and national research organizations. The role of the Practice Advocate has been funded by the Center for Clinical and Translational Research (CCTR).	
<b>Research Method:</b>	Focus groups, key informant interviews, and site visit observations	
<b>Summary of Findings:</b>	Practice-based Research Networks (PBRNs) depend on healthy relationships with clinical practices. During site visits conducted in the Spring of 2014, practices identified new regulations, unintended consequences of healthcare reform, community integration, health information technology, patient centered medical home redesign, and unforeseen challenges with wellness care as major topics of interest and focus.	
<b>Summary of Impacts:</b>	<p><b>Academic:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research topics mutually identified through group process with practices and researchers</li> <li>• Rapid translation of findings into action</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research topics mutually identified through group process with practices and researchers</li> <li>• Rapid translation of findings into action</li> </ul>

This report provides information on the engagement process of a model Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) partnership called Virginia Ambulatory Care Outcomes Research Network (ACORN). ACORN is a network of primary care practices (practices) located throughout VA that have agreed to work with researchers in the VCU Department of Family Medicine and Population Health towards improved primary care delivery for improved health. VCU defines CEnR as:

*“A collaborative process between the researcher and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. CEnR identifies the assets of all stakeholders and incorporates them in the design and conduct of the different phases of the research process.”*

ACORN is one of almost two hundred Practice-based Research Networks (PBRNs) throughout the U.S. PBRNs are heavily dependent upon their relationships with practices to conduct real world

research that is important to primary care. As a PBRN, ACORN is an ideal setting for a CEnR partnership. Grounded in mutually respectful relationships, ACORN enables practices and VCU researchers to work in tandem to develop and lead a research agenda.

ACORN was founded in 1996 through funding provided by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)<sup>1</sup>. Upon conclusion of the original grant to establish ACORN, network activities focused on tasks related to specific intervention studies involving a subset of ACORN practices. Practices participating in interventions remained engaged in the network while others became peripherally involved. This was an important lesson for the network: relationships require continuous tending.

The addition of ACORN's Practice Advocate (PA) led to a renewed focus on re-engaging all network practices in order to 1) tend to existing relationships, 2) identify the needs and interests of our member practices, and 3) strategically develop the research direction of the VCU team such that it is founded on and informed by those interests. The

PA conducts regular site visits and uses a number of methods to engage practices and improve communication in order to establish meaningful, bi-directional relationships to work towards transforming care delivery in ways responsive to practice identified concerns.

Coinciding with the start of PA role, and the most recent round of site visits, VCU researchers identified the need to establish a network Board, transferring leadership and the seat of network decision making from the VCU research team to a collaborative team with majority practice membership. Surveying interest among members, the Practice Advocate was able to recruit a diverse set of individuals to serve on the ACORN Interim Board. Board members include practice clinicians, nurses, and staff. ACORN's Board now provides the network with organizational leadership and advisement, ideas for infrastructure development, direction regarding the strategic mission and vision, and selects, reviews, approves, and evaluates network participation in studies and projects. The Board has identified an interest in establishing an ACORN Patient Council to inform patient-centered research, along with several other development goals.

ACORN network members are located throughout the state and in response to their needs, the ACORN newsletter is distributed via an online system that enables easy access for readers and tracks reader activity and member interests. Google Analytics provide information regarding for instance, frequencies when newsletters are opened, when they are forwarded, and the number of times embedded links are used. The ACORN Clinician Perspective is another form of engagement that practice members have come to value. This is a bi-monthly series of topical questions distributed to the membership. Members are given two weeks to

answer the questions and then the results are shared with the group as part of a learning community. Participation in answering the questions has doubled since its inception. Members have expressed value in learning about other clinicians' perspectives around such topics as the new cholesterol guidelines and decisions to participate in Accountable Care Organizations.

The ACORN Practice Profile allows researchers to collect demographic and other information to help understand practice clinical interests, research goals, business and technology concerns, and ongoing quality improvement efforts. Having this information provides a comprehensive database of what is important to practices relative to the current health care environment and allows researchers opportunities to collaborate on topics most meaningful to those whom they hope to affect with their work.

Reshaping ACORN as an authentic CEnR partnership began in 2013. Results from that partnership are only beginning to disseminate with the network and among the PBRN community<sup>3,4</sup>. ACORN members are excited about the opportunity for the network Practice Advocate to present a poster on the network's new process at a national PBRN conference later this year<sup>2</sup>, sponsored by AHRQ. With renewed focus and energy, the ACORN research team is dedicated to providing greater value to members, promoting practice leadership to direct research activities, building a sense of community for network members, and documenting the achievements of engagement activities. The success of these efforts will be highly dependent on whether network activities truly matter to practices. Utilizing methods to measure, track, and observe the behaviors and interests of member practices will be essential to guide the evolving partnership.

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